



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



GOVERNOR AND TRIBAL LEADERS TOUR VETERANS FACILITIES IN THE HILLS

Last week, Gov. Daugaard, Secretary Larry Zimmerman (South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs), Secretary J.R. LaPlante (South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations) and Oglala Tribal Leaders toured the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and the VA Black Hills Health Care Center facilities.

Larry Wilcox, director of the Veterans Home, provided the tour of the Veterans Home and hosted the participants at lunch. Stephen DiStasio, director of the VABHHCS, provided the tour of the VA facilities.



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MEMORIAL DAY—MORE THAN JUST A THREE-DAY WEEKEND

Memorial Day Message from Secretary Zimmerman --

Memorial Day was born of compassion and empathy for those who courageously gave their lives to safeguard us and our way of life.

Let us all pause this Memorial Day to remember great and brave Americans – to recognize their valor and applaud the blessings their bravery has secured.

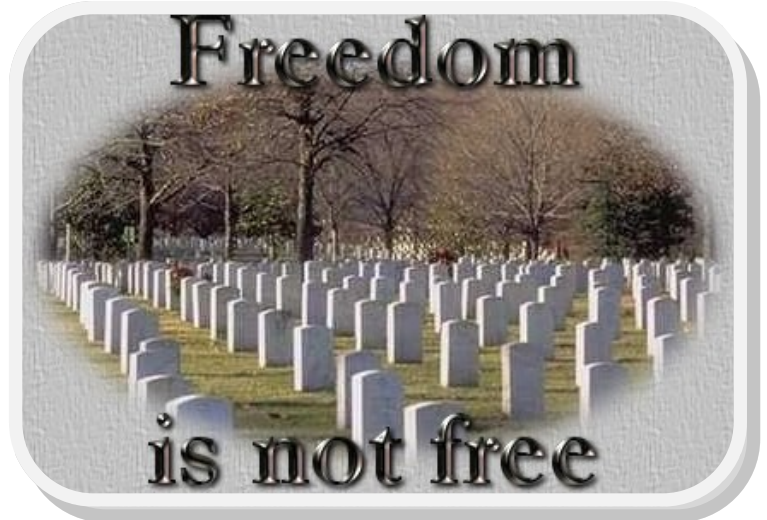
Throughout our nation's history, the freedoms we enjoy have been won and protected by an elite group who understand the greatest and most selfless love. The men and women of our armed forces risk the ultimate sacrifice to protect fellow Americans and citizens of the world from tyranny and oppression. Every time they put on the uniform, these heroes renew their commitment to pay any price, to bear any burden, so that we might be free.

Our records reflect South Dakota military casualties by wartime period were: World War I – 1,017; World War II – 1,599; Korean – 186; Vietnam – 210; and Gulf War – 37.

Let us all pause this Memorial Day to reflect on these men and women of selfless devotion. Let us all be reminded that the freedom we enjoy comes at a tremendous price. Veterans service organizations and community leaders throughout this great state host hundreds of Memorial Day services. Let us all attend one of these programs and show respect to those that gave all, and those that served and those that are serving in Harm's Way.

In the words of Lee Greenwood: "I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free. And I won't forget the men who died, who gave that right to me."

At the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, we embrace the meaning of these words, and on this Memorial Day we not only remember our fallen heroes and their families, but we recommit ourselves to be the voice for South Dakota's 74,000 veterans living, working and contributing to our society today. As always, veterans are encouraged to visit our website (<http://mva.sd.gov/default.html>) or visit their local County or Tribal Veterans Service Officer.



FAMILY AND FRIENDS RUN TO HONOR DEPLOYED SOLDIERS

Corey Wieczorek decided to honor her deployed boyfriend and his South Dakota Army National Guard unit by symbolizing their absence, and more importantly their return home, one step at a time.

Her boyfriend, Spc. Bronson Odle, deployed to Afghanistan in April with the Rapid City-based 235th Military Police Company. She researched the round-trip distance between Rapid City and Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, where the unit is stationed – a staggering 13,894 miles – and decided to run that distance while the unit is there.

“I wanted to do something with fitness for the guys and girls (of the unit),” said Wieczorek about the idea. Knowing that this was an almost impossible goal to undertake alone, she turned to her friends in the unit’s Family Readiness Group to assist her.

She started a Facebook page – Run Them Home – dedicated to tracking the miles of the group and communicating between members. So far, the page has 60 likes, and she has about 20 people sending in their miles to be logged. The idea came from a Family Readiness Group meeting in which Wieczorek and some other 235th family members discussed a tangible fitness goal they could all share during the unit’s deployment.

“We have logged 2,088.8 miles since we began around April 21st,” said Wieczorek. That is 2,088.8 miles in a mere 19 days. Some members of the 235th asked if they could contribute their miles toward the goal, but Wieczorek declined. “They wanted to use their miles, but we wouldn’t let them,” said Wieczorek. “This is something we are doing for them.”

Wieczorek also talked about support that has been offered by the community in the effort. “My group at Girls, Incorporated in Rapid City has volunteered to give up one of their field trips to go to the Mickelson Trail to participate,” said Wieczorek, who is also planning to coordinate a 5K event toward the end of the deployment.

“It helps with the separation,” said Wieczorek. “It makes me feel like I am doing something. Running and working out is a natural anti-depressant – and it gives me something to do.”

To support or contribute to the goal, go to <http://www.facebook.com/RunThemHome>, like the page and log your miles, or contact Cori Wieczorek at coriwieczorek@gmail.com to have your miles logged.



NEW SD STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM AND RIBBON BEING AWARDED

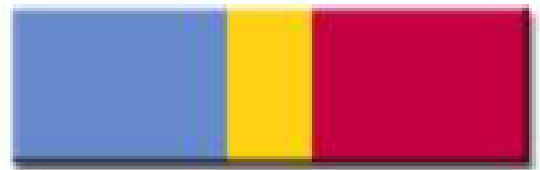
A new South Dakota National Guard State Partnership Program Ribbon is now being awarded to guardsmen who have deployed to the Republic of Suriname in support of a State Partnership Program (SPP) mission.

Any soldier or airman of the SDNG who have deployed to the Republic of Suriname, OCONUS (outside the continental United States) to any other country with a Surinamese delegation, in support of the SPP to perform duty for a period of at least five continuous days (travel days included) are eligible for the ribbon.

The South Dakota and Suriname partnership was formally established in August of 2006; however, authority for this award is retroactive to June 16, 2006. Since then, numerous exchanges have taken place where South Dakota service members traveled to Suriname and vice versa to engage in different types of subject matter expert exchanges and activities.

This is a one-time award and no devices, such as oak leaf clusters, will be attached to the ribbon. Once an individual receives the award, they will not be considered for second or subsequent awards. Submission for the award goes through the SDNG SPP office to the deputy chief of staff for personnel office.

The ribbon is divided vertically into three parts of blue, gold and red. The colors of the ribbon represent the significance of the partnership between the state of South Dakota and the Republic of Suriname by representing the colors of each of their flags; the blue typifies the eternal skies expanding above both nations, the red symbolizes progress and prosperity and gold signifies wealth.



The SPP is a U.S. Department of Defense program managed by the National Guard that links U.S. states with partner countries around the world for the purpose of supporting the security cooperation objectives of the geographic combatant commanders. By linking U.S. states with designated partner countries, the SPP stated aim is to promote access, enhance military capabilities, improve interoperability and enhance the principles of responsible governance.

All SPP activities are coordinated through the geographic combatant commanders, the U.S. ambassadors' country team, the partner state, and other agencies as appropriate, to ensure that National Guard support is tailored to meet both U.S. and partner country objectives. Specifically, all activities must support the theater campaign plan, as well as individual U.S. ambassador mission plans in the countries where they operate.

The unique civil-military nature of the National Guard allows active participation in a wide range of security cooperation activities, such as: emergency management and disaster response, border and port security, leadership development, medical support, economic security, natural resource protection, peacekeeping operations, counter trafficking, counter proliferation and counter terrorism.

SDNG MUSEUM TO HOST KOREAN WAR DISPLAY

The South Dakota National Guard Museum, in Pierre, will be hosting the Department of Defense 60th Anniversary Korean War Commemoration exhibit. The exhibit will be on display at the Museum from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Friday, July 26, and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, July 27.

Over the past three years, Bob Hill, South Dakota's Ambassador to the Department of Defense 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee, has displayed the exhibit in the communities of Brookings, Mitchell, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton and Watertown. Hill has worked endlessly to locate and recognize South Dakota's Korean War Veterans.

In addition to the exhibit, there will also be a wreath laying ceremony at the Korean War Memorial at the Capitol Lake in Pierre on Saturday, July 27, at 11 a.m. Immediately following the ceremony, a lunch will be served at the Post 8 American Legion cabin in Pierre, followed by the presentation of Korean War Commemoration certificates.

The Department of Defense Anniversary of the Korean War commemoration period began in 2010 and concludes in 2013, coinciding with the 60th Anniversary of the Korean War, (1950-1953).



BOWEN TELLS CLASSMATES HE WANTS TO BE FIELD OFFICER LIKE HIS FATHER

Students at Jefferson Elementary School in Pierre were asked to research a career that they were interested in. They were directed to interview someone in that position and then write up a story and develop a photo board and an oral presentation.

It's evident that Kevin Bowen, veterans field officer for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, is passionate about his work and openly shares with his family the rewards in doing his job. When asked what his career choice was, Ruben Bowen proudly said, "I want to serve my country in the military and then I want to be a veterans field officer like my dad!"

Kudos to Kevin for sharing the wonderful story of his job with his son! It is important that we take the time to educate the next generation about the men and women that don the uniform and protect the freedoms we all enjoy today.



BLACK HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY MEMORIAL DAY PROGRAM

The Black Hills National Cemetery will observe Memorial Day on Monday, May 27, 2013. There will be two ceremonies held at the Black Hills National Cemetery's Committal Shelter to memorialize all of our Nation's departed veterans and military members.

Visitors may visit and place flowers on graves of their loved ones all weekend long.

The theme for their program is "Our Fallen, Our Hero's, Our Freedom."

The Native American Memorial Day Ceremony will be held at 9:00 a.m. sponsored by the Oglala Sioux Tribe. Guest speakers will be Bryan Brewer (President, OST), Chuck Conroy (President, OST Veterans Board), and Wilmer Nesteth. Traditional Lakota drummers will also perform during the ceremony.

The "Traditional" Memorial Day Ceremony, sponsored by the American Legion will be held at 11:00 a.m. Guest speakers will be Verle Whipple, South Dakota American Legion Vice Commander District 1 & 2, and Greg Hall 40 and 8 Chef de Gare Grand du South Dakota. The Haakon County Crooners will perform the National Anthem and provide a musical tribute.

VIETNAM VETERANS HELP CLEAN THE STATE WAR MEMORIALS

Pierre-area Vietnam and Vietnam Era Veterans Association dedicated a weekend to clean up the War Memorials at Capitol Lake in Pierre.

Veterans and their families cleaned the World War II, Korean and Vietnam War memorials.

Department staff Larry Person, Charles Claussen and John Fette assisted with this project.



STIOUX FALLS VET CENTER HAS OPEN HOUSE

Aaron Pollard represented the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs at the Sioux Falls Vet Center Open House on May 15. Their new location is 3200 W. 49th Street. Pollard

made comments on behalf of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

Cutting the ribbon for the open house were: Brenda Teunissen, Roger Ervin, Jerry Goodall, LtCol Tami Miekke, Brian Wallin, Jim Teller, Louis Goetschius, and Mark DeGraw.



DRAFT GULF WAR TASK FORCE REPORT RELEASED

United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced that the Department's Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses Task Force will publish a comprehensive draft report in the Federal Register for public feedback and comment. The report describes how the Department of Veterans Affairs has been, and will continue to address the concerns of veterans who deployed during the Gulf War in 1990 and 1991.

Over the past several years, the Task Force has refined an integrated roadmap to better synchronize efforts and improve care and services to Gulf War Veterans. The VA is working towards these efforts becoming a part of the culture and operations. This year's report continues to focus on efforts to improve health care for Gulf War Veterans including innovative enhancements to clinical care. The draft report identifies seven specific areas where the VA will strive to improve services for Gulf War Veterans. The seven areas focus on important components of health care, such as veteran-centric approaches to specialty and primary care, delivering veteran benefits, and improving open communications with Gulf War Veterans. The Task Force also developed plans to improve linkages between specialty knowledge and services at the basic point of care to address treatment for chronic multi-symptom illness, an ongoing concern of Gulf War Veterans, their families and their providers.

The VA and the Department of Defense recently approved a research project to develop a long-term exposure record to collect and share deployment and exposure data between the two Departments, a model informed by lessons learned in earlier Gulf War studies.

The VA is seeking public comments on the draft Task Force report before final publication. The public notice and instructions for how to submit electronic and comments via postal mail will be posted at www.regulations.gov, and the draft written report will be open for comment for 30 days. In addition, the VA recognizes that a great number of Gulf War Veterans use the Internet on a daily basis to share their ideas and concerns, so the VA has also created a public discussion board on the seven focus areas at: <http://vagulfwartaskforce.uservoice.com/>. To view the report without making recommendations, please visit VA's website at:

http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/Draft_2012_GWVI-TF_Report.pdf.



Please join us at the

ALL VETERAN REUNION

VA Black Hills Health Care System Welcome Home Event

Saturday, August 3
Mueller Civic Center
Hot Springs, SD

The All Veteran Reunion is being held during "Honoring Our Heroes", an area-wide event featuring the "Cost of Freedom Tribute", the "American Veterans Traveling Tribute", the Agent Orange "Quilt of Tears", and more August 1-4, 2013 in Hot Springs, SD

Save the date, August 3rd, and join us for this free event.

Veterans and their families:

3-5:00 PM: Benefits Fair and Social

5-6:30 PM: Picnic

Veterans, their families and the general public:

6:30-8:00 pm: A Tribute To Our Nation's Heroes and their families

- Featuring music by The Potter Family:
Through the Years, We Honor You

Additional Reunion Information: Lori Vosika, 605.745.2000 Ext 92176

Honoring Our Heroes



August 1-4, 2013

Centennial Park and Mueller Civic Center

Hot Springs, SD

Additional information at: www.legionriderspost71.com



www.blackhills.va.gov

VA MANDATES OVERTIME TO INCREASE PRODUCTION OF COMPENSATION CLAIMS DECISION

As part of its ongoing effort to accelerate the elimination of the disability compensation claims backlog, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices. This surge, which will be implemented through the end of fiscal year 2013, will be used to help eliminate the backlog with continued emphasis on high-priority claims for homeless veterans and those claiming financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and veterans filing Fully Developed Claims.

This is the latest effort in support of the Secretary's plan to reduce the backlog. Last month, the VA announced an initiative to expedite compensation claims decisions for veterans who have waited one year or longer. On April 19, the VA began prioritizing claims decisions for veterans who have been waiting the longest, by providing provisional decisions that allow eligible veterans to begin collecting compensation benefits quickly. With a provisional decision, a veteran has a year to submit additional information to support a claim before the decision becomes final.

Claims for wounded warriors separating from the military for medical reasons will continue to be handled separately and on a priority basis with the Department of Defense through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES). On average, wounded warriors separating through IDES currently receive VA compensation benefits in two months following their separation from service.

Veterans can learn more about disability benefits on the joint Department of Defense—VA web portal eBenefits at <http://www.ebenefits.va.gov>.

More information about filing Fully Developed Claims is available at: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/transformation/fastclaims/>.

STAFF PARTICIPATE IN YELLOW RIBBONS

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs staffers Kevin Swanson and Ryan Fowler participated in the recent Yellow Ribbon event for the 935th in Rapid City and George Arends participated in the 927th Yellow Ribbon in Sioux Falls.

Staff briefed the soldiers and their families on state and federal benefits, educational benefits, OJT and apprenticeship programs.

Staff also manned a booth and had information available on benefits available to veterans and their families.



Upcoming Events

May 24—Hiring our Hero Veterans—American Legion—Pierre—9:00 am
 Jun. 6-9—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota Hotel/Conference Center—Rapid City
 Jun. 13-16—VFW State Convention—Watertown Convention Center
 Jun. 19—Hiring our Hero Veterans—TREA—1981 E. Centre Street—Rapid City—10:00 am
 Jul. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am
 Jul. 8—SD Veterans Council—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:30 am
 Jul. 26—Korean War Commemoration Display—SDNG Museum—Pierre
 Jul. 27—Korean War Wreath Laying Ceremony at the SD State Capitol—Pierre
 Jul. 31– Aug. 4—American Veterans Traveling Tribute—Hot Springs
 Aug. 4—Freedom Poker Ride—Hot Springs
 Aug. 24-25—Freedom Bird 2013—W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds—Sioux Falls 10:00 am—5:00 pm
 Aug. 21—Sioux Falls Veterans & Spouses Job Fair—Elmen Center (2505 S. Grange Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am
 Aug. 26-28—VSO Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre
 Sep. 11—Stand Down—Wagner
 Sep. 13—Stand Down Watertown
 Sep. 20—Stand Down—Sioux Falls—VFW Post 628 (3601 S. Minnesota Ave.) 8:00 am—3:00 pm
 Sep. 24—Stand Down—Aberdeen
 Oct. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am
 Dec. 15—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Black Hills National Cemetery—10:00 am

Good article to read was last week's Parade Magazine— Mother's Day Special: "Dinner with the Smiles." 'With all of the deployments South Dakota has seen over the past years, this article reminds us about the things most of us take for granted and reiterates what small gestures mean to families with loved ones that are deployed.

<http://www.parade.com/12952/sarahsmiley/mothers-day-special-dinner-with-the-smileys/>



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